1. Introduction

St Bonaventure died during the Second Council of Lyons on 15 July 1274 to the great regret of all around him. As Minister General of the Franciscans, he was appointed Cardinal Bishop of Albano by Pope Gregory X in the spring of 1273, and this development interrupted the course of lectures or collations that he was giving in the University of Paris in Eastertide that year between 9 April and 28 May. This was in fact the third such course that Bonaventure delivered as Minister General to Franciscans and others in the university.[1] The first two, given in Lent, discussed the *Ten Commandments*[2] in 1267 and the *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* in 1268.[3] Part of their purpose was to challenge and correct certain philosophical tendencies in the university, which were formally condemned in 1270 by Étienne Tempier, Bishop of Paris. Bonaventure specifically picked up where he left off in 1268 in discussing the Holy Spirit, when in 1273 he delivered the last of his collations, called variously *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* or *Illuminations of the Church*.[4] Because of his appointment as a cardinal and bishop, he was unable to complete the course of lectures as planned. The text that remains is therefore incomplete and was not finally edited by Bonaventure himself. It is recorded in two separate and varying recensions.[5] It represents the culmination of his thought, however, and it is also a fine if demanding epitome of how Bonaventure approached Christian theology as the path to divine wisdom.

By the time that Bonaventure delivered this formidable body of teaching he had had a distinguished and interesting career, firstly, as a master teaching in the University of Paris, and, then, from 1257 as Minister General of the Franciscans. It is remarkable that he was able to prepare and deliver such substantial teaching in Paris, while spending so much of his time trekking back and forth across Europe on foot to supervise the fast growing Franciscan

movement. Bonaventure also retained the confidence of several popes and was influential behind the scenes on occasion in their succession. The Franciscan Order over which he presided was riven with conflict and difficulty, however, some of which arose from its rapid growth, and some from the manner of its founding and uncertainty about its ethos. His final body of teaching, the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron*, has to be seen therefore in the context of a multiplicity of serious concerns that preoccupied Bonaventure and other Franciscan leaders at that time.

Europe was plagued by violence and conflict, particularly in Italy. It was also afflicted by the impact of serious climatic disturbance arising from a remote, though then unknown, volcanic eruption in the Far East in 1257, the very year in which Bonaventure was appointed Minister General. The results in terms of crop failures, famine and disease were harbingers of the much graver crisis that would befall Europe in the next century in the form of the Black Death. These setbacks came at a time when the population of Europe's towns was growing rapidly, as many people left the land for work in these new economic centres. The poverty and social instability that this often caused was another source of political unrest and religious upheaval, evident in various radical social movements in many parts of Italy, with whose acute pastoral needs the Franciscans were often deeply involved, but with which they could also be too easily identified, often to the detriment of their reputation within the wider life of the Church. Within such social turbulence and hardship, apocalyptic expectations flourished, and many people were expecting the end of the world, or some other major epochal change in 1260, in the very years in which Bonaventure assumed leadership of the Franciscans.

It fell to Bonaventure, therefore, to provide steady and credible leadership to an order whose founder, Francis of Assisi, was already becoming a legend, but also a symbol of radical religious change and expectations in the minds of some. Bonaventure had to unite and manage a wide variety of followers, which numbered more than 30,000 in 32 provinces across Europe, including the women followers of Clare of Assisi. Bonaventure was appointed by the Pope to rescue the situation after the precipitate resignation of his predecessor, John of Parma, in 1257, who was accused of heresy because of his sympathy for the apocalyptic teaching of Joachim of Fiore. As Minister General, Bonaventure had to keep together

fissiparous tendencies among the Franciscans that swirled around the question of the rigour with which the original teaching of Francis could and should actually be observed, and whether such a radical espousal of poverty was not itself the harbinger of a new age of the Church in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ. At a more practical level, Bonaventure had also to ensure the moral discipline of the Order, which was often prone to scandal, hypocrisy and greed, with public opprobrium as a result. Central to his concern as a theologian and teacher was raising the standard of learning and preaching among the Franciscans, and many of his writings as Minister General were to this end. Tragically, sometime after Bonaventure's death in 1274, the Franciscan Order split apart, sharply divided between 'conventuals' and 'spirituals', with disastrous consequences for all involved.

Bonaventure's *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* has therefore to be seen within a precise and complex historical context. When the argument of the text is clearly heard in its entirety, however, it becomes readily apparent that no one preoccupation dominates beyond the ultimate acquisition of divine wisdom itself, which was Bonaventure's overriding spiritual concern throughout his life and teaching. His method and intention in these *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* was to claim the high ground of theology, to drive out bad theology with good and to provide his hearers, in the university as well as among the Franciscans, with a cogent and integrated approach to the many facets of Christian belief, thereby addressing directly the concerns of the time and of the Franciscan Order in particular. Bonaventure drew on his own long experience as a teacher and a practitioner of prayer and, also, as a pastor, an organising genius and a skilled communicator; and his leadership was highly regarded by many. In his use of the Bible, assisted by his formidable and exhaustive memory and by his wide knowledge of the Fathers of the Church, patristic and medieval, Bonaventure showed real originality in his selection, analysis and exposition. The *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* constitutes therefore an invaluable window into his mind at the pinnacle of its development. It can be studied as a complete epitome of his theology, well rooted in his earlier teaching. It is one of the most outstanding, original and interesting texts of the High Middle Ages.[6]

Part of the challenge of reading Bonaventure's *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* is mastering its intricate structure and discerning with clarity the inherent line of his argument. In creating theology

prompted by reflection upon the opening chapter of Genesis, Bonaventure was following a well-trodden path in Christianity, emulating distinguished predecessors like Basil and Augustine. The assumption underlying this whole approach was that the framework of created reality, outlined in Genesis chapter one, is actually a master key to understanding the mind of God in relation to the creation, redemption and the sanctification of human beings, who are made in the divine image and likeness. This conviction was further guided, inspired and authorised by the prologue of John's gospel, which, echoing Genesis chapter one, portrays Christ the Word of God as the key to understanding all created reality and as the incarnate embodiment of the wisdom of God, a teaching that is evident in the thought of Paul as well, for example, in his letter to the Colossians.

For the modern reader, however, the intricate structure of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* by Bonaventure can easily obscure the full range, force and depth of his thought and argument. As an idiom and means of expression so remote from modern thinking, the framework of this text can in fact easily initially obscure rather than reveal. The recent translator of this work into English has therefore provided a detailed and invaluable synopsis of its structure along with copious indices to assist the reader.[7]

In this study of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron*, there is a full epitome of Bonaventure's teaching and argument with appropriate commentary and interpretation, so that what he was saying may be heard and appreciated with as much clarity, force and completeness as possible, thus making the new translation of the text into English even more accessible and useful. The initial chapters of this study which set the context are intended to enable a reader to approach the text of Bonaventure fully equipped to do justice to the rich range of its contents. The stature and scope of Bonaventure's *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* may be compared with Augustine's *City of God*, which was also written at a time of crisis in the Church and in Western history.

The crucial question governing the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* was how the Bible should be read in the light of human history and with reference to the incarnation of Christ. What, or who, was the essential authority underlying and determining Christian theology and philosophy? It was Bonaventure's unwavering belief that the person of Christ is in fact the key to answering these fundamental questions of history and belief in every generation. His mode of

approach, however, was determined by important developments in how the Bible was being read in his day, in the monasteries, in the universities and also among the friars: 'Bonaventure found himself at a crossroads of different ways of reading: the traditional monastic *lectio divina*, the increasingly dominant *studium legendi* at the universities, and the emerging exercise of *lectio spiritualis* among the mendicant orders'[8] – the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Bonaventure's aim in these collations was to equip his hearers to read the Bible in a truly disciplined and contemplative way, thus, 'integrating philosophical knowledge where appropriate and theological understanding with the wisdom of Scripture' (see endnote 8). The Franciscan student had to steer between the Scylla of academic rationalism in the universities and the Charybdis of a wholesale assault on the moral integrity of mendicant life, ethics and teaching within the life of the Church.[9] Franciscans and others were also vulnerable to the blandishments of more prophetic and charismatic traditions, being allured by apocalyptic speculations, which claimed authority because of their more arcane, spiritual and predictive nature.

The form of such collations within the life of the University of Paris had been established earlier in the thirteenth century around the year 1231 as a double sermon whereby the preacher would expand in the evening upon his morning address. The Dominicans and Franciscans led the field in this development, which had its roots in monastic tradition, and it thus became a regular part of university life and Franciscan educational formation. According to the second recension of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron*, Bonaventure addressed no fewer than 160 masters, bachelors and students of divinity in the university, many but not all of whom were Franciscans.[10] What he had to say was clearly of commanding interest. His intention was to bring together the intellectual and affective modes of reading Scripture, in accordance with his own understanding of how mind and heart should work together in response to divine truth and love. By so doing, he addressed the philosophical and moral challenges confronting his Order and sought to equip its members better to proclaim the Gospel of Christ: but 'for Bonaventure, a good exegete must always be a contemplative'.[11] He believed that, in Christianity, knowledge has to move with love through understanding towards sanctity and divine wisdom. That is the goal of all Christian theology, which has its foundation in Scripture, with Christ as its key.[12]

If Christ is the master key for understanding the 'little book' of Scripture alongside the 'great book' of creation, he is also the key to understanding the significance of the Trinity and the way in which the life of God overflows and finds expression in creation and in the human person. This understanding of Christ is the only sure foundation for any real human knowledge because he is the centre and ground of truth, which has its origin in the mind of God. For, on its own, the human mind has no secure basis for knowing anything with complete certainty. Christ the Word of God is the one through whom human beings come to understand the truth of divine wisdom, because in him 'the principle of being and knowing is the same'.[13] Prayer is therefore the essential component to such genuine thought, knowledge and wisdom, and in Christian theology, thought and prayer can never be separated from loving desire. This is evident in the prayer of Bonaventure himself contained within this text: 'Lord, I came from you most high, I come to you most high, and through you most high.'[14] These words were modelled by him on the saying of Christ about his own origin and return to the Father in John's gospel.[15]

The imitation of Christ is therefore not only by the path of apostolic poverty. It is also by an ardent desire for sanctity, which means active participation in the love of God revealed in Christ, even to the point of suffering with him.[16] Such love in the end transcends all knowledge and understanding; for the wisdom of God is His love, as revealed in the crucified Christ: 'Everything else is stripped away, even to the point of mystical death, which imitates Christ's own death.'[17] The path back to God is founded upon the consecration of the mind and the will in humble and lifelong loving obedience to Christ's example. This spirit of loving desire determines how Scripture should be read and its teaching applied, as in the words of the psalm: 'O God, you are my God, early and eagerly will I seek you.'[18]

The pivot of the argument in the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* is found in the third collation, where Bonaventure demonstrates how Christ is the key to all genuine human knowledge, understanding and wisdom. This threefold capacity within human nature, which mirrors the Trinity in whose image and likeness it is made, is engaged by Christ, who comes from the Father as the uncreated Word through whom all things were made in the beginning. He became the incarnate Word to redeem and

restore lost humanity to the true image and likeness of God. He continues to draw human beings back towards the love of God by his revealing Spirit as the inspired Word, who makes sense of all that exists and is its ultimate purpose.[19] The threefold appellation of Christ as the uncreated Word, the incarnate Word and the inspired Word governs all that Bonaventure proceeds to outline in these collations.[20] There is thus a threefold movement inherent in human existence: it proceeds from God the Father through the uncreated Word; it is redeemed by Christ as the incarnate Word; and it is being led back to God by the Holy Spirit of the inspired Word. Thus, 'the eternal expression of the uncreated Word explains how things come from God; the restoration by the incarnate Word explicates how all things reflect God; and the revelations of the inspired Word elucidate how everything returns to God'.[21] Christ is therefore the sole teacher of all contemplative wisdom, being its human embodiment. The rest of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* is a detailed and structured exposition of this commanding vision.

All that Bonaventure taught, here as elsewhere, was rooted in Scripture, and he assumed a thorough knowledge of the Bible on the part of his hearers, without which the significance of many of his allusions would be lost. The full context of any scriptural reference is therefore often just as important as its actual citation. Both the Latin and English editions of this text are well supplied with detailed biblical and other references, which reveal the astonishing range of Bonaventure's memory and knowledge.

The story of the manuscripts and the transmission of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* is an interesting one.[22] The first thing to realise is that neither recension actually came from the pen of Bonaventure directly, even though both were apparently checked to varying extents by him before he was drawn away to higher duties as a cardinal. The *textus receptus* does not, therefore, enjoy at all times the clarity of expression that is the hallmark of Bonaventure's other writings. It represents a *reportatio* taken down by intelligent students; and the first recension represents a further stage, that of a *redactio* with a view to its eventual publication.[23] There is a vivid glimpse of this process in the lament of the person who compiled the second recension, which seems to have been altered in places some time later.[24] He was a young Franciscan student who deeply regretted the fact that Bonaventure was unable to complete the course of lectures he had

outlined. This second recension presents interesting variations with the first recension, which constitutes the *textus receptus* in Bonaventure's *Opera Omnia* and which has now been translated into English. After vouching for hearing Bonaventure *viva voce* and noting down what he said, the youthful compiler affirmed that what he wrote was read by others who had been present and who helped to correct it: 'The author of the work and several others certified that they were grateful to me.' This was not quite a formal endorsement, however:

> Many days later, the reverend father and brother, Thomas, the Minister for Upper Germany, granted me much time and many books, so that I could go over what I had written in a hasty hand. I attempted to recollect it in an orderly manner with the help of my memory, recalling how I had heard the voice of the lecturer; and also of sight, recalling his gestures, which usually help the memory. I did not add anything that Bonaventure himself had not said, however, except that I identified more completely than he had the various books of the Philosopher [i.e. Aristotle]. Otherwise, I did not add anything, except that I added references to his [biblical and patristic] quotations.[25]

This personal testimony gives a good indication of the way in which theology was taught, remembered and written down in a thirteenth-century university environment. In fact, this second recension remains now in only one single manuscript that is preserved in Siena.[26] It is a shorter and more concise text, whose variants were not included in the *textus receptus* in the *Opera Omnia* that was published at Quaracchi near Florence in 1891. Twelve manuscripts of this longer first recension remain, two of which were only discovered in 1984 and long after the initial publication in 1891.[27] These recent discoveries in libraries in Tours and St Petersburg have corroborated the reliability of the first recension. A comparative study of the two recensions of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* has yet to be made, however, and the second recension awaits translation into English.

The influence of the *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* on subsequent Western theology has to be considered within the wider context of Bonaventure's many writings and their legacy.[28] Any assessment must include consideration of the impact of Bonaventure's

approach upon the Franciscan study of philosophy and theology in Paris and Oxford and elsewhere, as evident in the leadership and writings of Bonaventure's pupils and friends, Matthew of Aquasparta (c.1235-1302), a successor as Minister General, John Peckham (c.1225-92), who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1279, and Peter John Olivi (1248-98), the gifted but controversial leader of the Spiritual Franciscans.[29] The leading theologians in the early fifteenth century, Jean Gerson (1363-1429) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64) were deeply influenced by Bonaventure's attempt to hold together the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of Christian theology within an orthodox Catholic tradition.[30] Gerson made the case for Bonaventure's canonisation, acclaiming him as the most outstanding theologian, whose writings were central to his own thought and spiritual life. He described Bonaventure as 'the wisest in intellect and at the same time the most devout in feeling', whose most brilliant work was his *Itinerarium*.[31]

There is no doubt also that the widespread copying of the spiritual writings of Bonaventure, along with other similar literature widely attributed to him, stimulated and spoke to the movement for lay spiritual renewal called *Devotio Moderna* in the fifteenth century, whose most abiding memorial is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (c.1380-1471). It was also in the later fifteenth century that there was a fresh appreciation of Bonaventure's stature and significance as a theologian, which led to his canonisation by Pope Sixtus IV in 1482, and subsequently to his proclamation by Pope Sixtus V as *Doctor Seraphicus* of the Catholic Church in 1588.[32]

It was Pope Leo XIII at the end of the nineteenth century who prompted the preparation of a definitive edition of Bonaventure's authentic works, and it is upon the basis of the Quaracchi edition that all subsequent study of Bonaventure has rested. The influence of Bonaventure has grown within the Catholic Church as the preponderance of Thomism waned in the years before and after Vatican II. Three modern Catholic theologians, in particular, of considerable originality of thought and spiritual stature, owe much to Bonaventure, and his influence within their copious writings is very apparent. The first of these was Romano Guardini (1885-1968), whose first engagement with theology was a detailed study of Bonaventure.[33] The second was Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88), who was himself deeply influenced by Guardini, and

whose own writings reveal his deep sympathy with Bonaventure, especially with the aesthetic and contemplative dimensions of his theological vision.[34] The third modern Catholic theologian to build his approach to Christian theology on that of Bonaventure is Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI.[35] His inaugural study of Bonaventure's *Collations on the Hexaëmeron* was groundbreaking and it has remained of critical importance ever since.[36] Since Vatican II, the influence of Bonaventure has grown steadily within the Roman Catholic Church, and his theology is of great interest and relevance also to Anglicans, Lutherans and Orthodox Christians.[37]